

# **Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology**

## **BACHELOR'S DEGREE FINAL PROJECT**

**Title:**

"The EU Single Voice after Lisbon:  
implications of the permanent presidency of the Council preparatory bodies"

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**ABSTRACT** The Lisbon treaty aimed to give more coherence, visibility to the EU and strengthen its Single Voice. For that reason, Lisbon replaced the old system of six-month rotating presidencies with permanent ones in some of the Council's organs, especially in the CFSP area. Leaving aside the debate on whether the Single Voice is an effective strategy in international negotiations, this contribution investigates if this institutional modification has achieved its goal or, on the contrary, has been harmful for the internal cohesiveness of the organs in which has been implemented. By comparing the internal dynamics of the PSC and the CFSP CWGs chaired by the permanent chairmanship with the informal system used in the MEAs still supervised by the rotating presidency, this paper seeks to show which consequences the permanent chairmanship has had since Lisbon and whether other solutions were possible to fulfil the same aims.

**KEY WORDS** EU Single Voice, Rotating Presidency, PSC, CFSP WGs, MEAs, Lead negotiator.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is usually assumed that a more internal cohesive European Union would be more effective on the international fora. This link between internal cohesiveness and external influence has been present in the analysis and speeches of many politicians and authors who claim that the strength of the EU lies on having a “Single Voice”. This assumption was indeed a motivation behind some of the modifications brought by the Lisbon Treaty, which tried to increase the competence of the EU in a variety of policy areas and international settings (da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014). One of its institutional changes was to replace the system of rotating presidencies in the Council with permanent ones, especially in foreign policy. From then on the Foreign Affairs Council has been permanently chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Political Security Committee as well as some of the CFSP working groups also received a permanent chair: an European External Action Service official appointed by the HR. The intention behind was to implement a more continuous, coherent and effective European Foreign Policy while encouraging member states to take more ownership in this area (Maurer and Wright 2019). In short, Lisbon aimed to increase the internal cohesiveness in these organs and to facilitate the creation of a strong single message.

More than a decade after the reforms introduced by Lisbon, this paper investigates what consequences has had the permanent presidency in the EU Single Voice. Has the permanent presidency ensured the continuity on the agenda and internal cohesiveness of its organs? Or has produced some countereffects damaging the formation of a single message? To answer these questions, this contribution is divided in three sections. The first one will consist of the definition of EU Single Voice, the enumeration of the main changes brought by Lisbon and the principle critics of the rotating Presidency. The second part will be the analysis of which advantages and drawbacks has the permanent presidency in the PSC and the CFSP CWGs and how the internal dynamic has changed since its introduction.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The basis for this section draws from a series of interviews conducted in 2006, 2011, 2018 and 2019 with PSC ambassadors, officials within Permanent Representations, national delegates of the CFSP WGs and EEAS officials carried out by Ana E. Juncos and Karolina Pomorska for their studies “Playing the Brussels Game: strategic socialisation in the CFSP CWGs” and “Invisible and unaccountable? National Representatives and Council Officials in EU foreign policy”; Sophie Vanhoonacker, Karolina Pomorska and Heidi Maurer for their analysis “The presidency in EU External Relations: who is at the helm?”; Maurer and Nicholas Wright for the paper “Still governing in the shadows? The role of the PSC in the post-Lisbon EU foreign policy architecture”; and Michel Anderlini for his study “A humble servant or an agenda-setter? The role(s) of the EEAS as chair of CWGs on EU’s Common and Foreign Policy”.

Then, it is going to study the informal system used in the Multilateral Environment Agreements: the “lead negotiator”, in which the rotating president is still present. The purpose of this comparison is to discover the effect of the two models of presidency on the internal cohesiveness of the organs and which one ensures better the continuity on the agenda and consensus. Lastly, the final section offers the conclusions summarizing our findings and its limitations.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. What does it mean to have a “Single Voice”?

When the former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, in “A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy” of 2016 establishes that “a strong Union is one that thinks strategically, shares a vision and acts together”, she is referring, among other issues, to the EU Single Voice (Mogherini 2016). Moreover, when in the introductory speech of the convention on the Future of Europe of 2002, the former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing noted that “the world would feel better if it could count on Europe, a Europe which spoke with a single voice to affirm respect for its alliances, but also to proclaim, whenever necessary, a message of tolerance and moderation, of openness towards difference, and of respect for human rights” he is expressing a common belief in the EU: in order to be effective in the external world a single voice is needed (Giscard 2002). But what does “single voice” mean?

In order to address the theoretical part of the EU “Single Voice”, the suggestion of former Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy to make a distinction between “single voice” referring to **one message** and “single mouth” referring to the **messenger** is a good starting point (Lamy 2002). That is to say, a single voice can refer to the unity or coherence of the conveyed by the EU on the one hand or to the question whether there is a single negotiator speaking for the EU on the other hand (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). However, following this duality, the best definition might be the one given by Macaj and Nicolaïdis which joins this two faces and establishes that “one voice is the expression of a common position among EU member states through a single representative or negotiator, that can be an EU institutions or one or several member states” (Macaj and Nicolaïdis, 2014, 1069).

As shown above, the statement of the main literature about the existence of a “**single voice mantra**” is certain. It is generally thought that more unity leads to a much more influential EU in the global arena. Although for a long time scholars had also widely assumed that a single voice was a necessary and sufficient condition for the EU to be an effective actor in world politics, since 2010 they have started to question this direct positive correlation between the degree of internal cohesiveness and external effectiveness in global governance (da Conceição-Heldt 2014).

Some authors have illustrated that in contrast to this conventional thought this single voice is not enough or counterproductive. Esther Barbé argued that searching a single voice can result in inefficiency and lack of flexibility and it is useless when there is an unfavourable international power structure and can even be counterproductive when actors show a “EU normative rejection” because of, for example, its colonial history (Barbé 2012). Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt found that the effectiveness of the EU was not influenced only by the internal cohesiveness but for the bargaining power symmetry or asymmetry of all the actors, so even though there is a high internal cohesiveness if there is a bargaining power symmetry it can entail high ineffectiveness, like in the Doha round (da Conceição-Heldt 2014). From another perspective, Macaj and Nicolaïdis have studied when EU benefits from strategic disunity based on the idea that the EU’s reputation and external credibility thrive also on diversity (Macaj and Nicolaïdis 2014).

These critics of the “one voice mantra” focuses on its outputs taking into account the aim and motivations of the EU translated into changes in the Treaties, but hardly they consider if these ones actually reinforced this Single Voice. In this brief study the aim is to follow and contribute, as far as possible, in the recent debate that has been raised: has the institutional changes provided in Lisbon result in a stronger Single Voice? Has the establishment of a permanent president meant an improvement for the internal cohesiveness? Or has it changed negatively the internal working dynamic of some organs, basis of its unity and internal effectiveness?

## **2.2. The Lisbon treaty: changes and modifications**

On 1 December 2009 the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. Trying to overcome the failure of the European Constitution, Lisbon uses the traditional method and reforms the already existing Constitutive Treaties (Cendón 2009). Even so, the changes brought by this treaty does not differ much in content from the ones that were thought in the Constitution. Mainly, the modifications abandoned were the ones related to symbols such as some denominations like “Constitution” or “union of states and citizens”.

In general terms, the main implications for the analysis are the following:

- **The structure of "pillars"** was abolished and a rigid **delimitation of competences** between the Union and member states was made. However, these pillars still serve as differentiation between practices. For example, the CFSP remain separate from the others and retains its intergovernmental nature (Wouters et al. 2012)
- The Union acquired **legal personality** (art. 47 TEU) which means that it can sign treaties since then.
- The figure of the **President of the European Council** was introduced and established as a permanent position, elected for a renewable period of two and a half years. This aims to give greater international visibility and continuity to the Presidency of the EU (art. 15) (Ibid).
- **The High Representative of the European Union For Foreign Affairs and Security Policy** became double-hatted as a Vice President of the European Commissions and is supported by the new **European External Action Service**, which consists of personnel from the Council General Secretariat, the Commission and seconded staff from national diplomatic services.

Thus, the HP/VP is at the forefront of the CFSP of the Union and, in such condition, presides over the Council of Foreign Affairs and, at the same time, is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission, responsible in the field of external relations (art. 18 TEU). Again, this responds to the intention of giving greater visibility and coherence to the EU's external action.

- Finally, Lisbon and the Council Decision L 322/28 of 1 December 2009 replaced the old system of six-month rotating presidencies with **permanent presidents** in some organs of the Council, especially those in CFPS and external relation.

As we mentioned above, the study is going to focus on this last institutional modification due to its implication in the role and the dynamics of the organs in question. Therefore, it is going to examine which critics the rotating presidency had and what was expected of its change to a permanent one. Then, in the analysis it is going to study if these expectations have been met.

### 2.3. The rotating presidency: critics and main shortcomings

The Council of the EU is a single legal entity, but it meets in 10 different configurations, depending on the subject being discussed. These later at the same time, are supported by the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (Coreper I and II) and more than 150 highly specialised working parties known as the “Council preparatory bodies” which carry out the technical debates (Council EU, 2019).

Until Lisbon, the EU was characterised by a single Presidency of the Council which was held every six months by a different member state. Therefore, the member states were the ones in charge of chairing the meetings of the working parties, the ministerial level and the meetings of the heads of state and government. Although this system allowed member states to be involved and preside over the EU regardless of their size, it was criticized that it **lacked continuity** and **relied on the organizational and leadership capacity of the country at the helm** (Vanhoonacker et al, 2011). Since the beginning of the 70s discussions about reform of the presidency were present. Apart from its lack of continuity on the agenda, other complains were constant: the political nature of the chair, its chaotic organisation, the insufficient preparation, and the increasing workload. (Vanhoonacker and Schout 2003). These critics of continuity on the agenda, leadership and coherence were especially visible in CFSP where the six-monthly stop-go process was increasingly seen as problematic (Bengtsson et al. 2004). Introducing a long-term chair in the FAC and its preparatory bodies, Lisbon tried to overcome these deficiencies.

Nonetheless, some authors have claimed that it is possible that this change will also have unforeseen and **undesirable consequences**. The legitimacy of the rotating presidency was high because it was a symbol of equality among member states. The fact that all of them had to take the presidency created a common empathy and comprise since all were aware of the difficulty of being in that position. At the same time, failing to reach an agreement was considered a failure, so everyone had a predisposition to work together (Maurer and Wright 2019).

The question is whether the introduction of a permanent presidency has ensured the expected continuity, coherence, and internal cohesiveness or has caused counterproductive effects. In the following section, it is going to be discussed how the role of the Presidency and internal work dynamics have mutated in the PSC and some CFSP WGs. Then, the study will focus on the EU International Environmental policy and the “lead negotiator” system to compare the previous work dynamics to one in which the presidency has not changed since Lisbon.



### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. The Political and Security Committee and CFSP working groups

In first place, when comparing the CFSP to other EU areas it is necessary to remember that the competence of the CFSP is not exclusive, shared or supporting. It is seen as a **special type of competence** and has specific rules and procedures (art. 24.1 TFEU). For example, the policy-framing, decision-making and implementation depends more on the European Council, the Council and the HR, opposed to the Commission and European Parliament. Besides, the decisions are by default to be adopted unanimously (Biondi et al. 2012).

Secondly, the **PSC** is one of the preparatory bodies of the FAC and one of the main EU bodies contributing to the formulation and implementation of European foreign policy (Juncos & Reynolds, 2007). It is explained in article 38 TEU and it is responsible for the CFSP and the EU CSDP. Specifically: follows the international situation; recommends strategic approaches and policy options to the Council; provides guidance to the Military Committee, the Political-Military Group and the Committee for civilian aspects of crisis management and exercises political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations.

The PSC became permanent in January 2001 and it was designed to correct the lack of continuity and permanency in the personnel of the key organisms and the shifting location of meetings, which was the capital of the six-monthly presidency (Howorth 2010). It is made up of the Brussels-based ambassadors of the member states and, since Lisbon, is chaired by representatives of the European External Action Service. It prepares the Foreign Affairs Council's monthly deliberations and PSC ambassadors meet twice a week and more frequently if necessary.

Below the PSC there are the **Council Working Groups**. The CWGs are composed by national representatives based in the Brussels Permanent Representations and their role is to discuss and draft CFSP documents such as Joint Actions, Council Conclusions and Action Plans (Juncos and Pomorska, 2007). As well as the PSC, some CWGs are now chaired by EEAS officials.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The following CFSP CWGs are chaired by EEAS officials: The CivCOM, the CONUN, the COSCE, the COHOM, the COTRA, the COEST, the COWEB, the MOG, the MAMA, the COAFR, the COASI, the COLAT, the CONOP, the COARM, the CODUN, the PMG and the Nicolaidis Group. (Council, 2019)

In order to see if Lisbon has put an end to the weaknesses of the rotating Presidency without damaging the internal cohesiveness of the organs explained, we have compiled and organized those studies on the subject based on interviews with PSC ambassadors and Working Group diplomats and EEAS officials. These papers had a different aim such as show which role has now the PSC (Maurer & Wright 2019), how was the role of EEAS as chair of the WGs (Anderlini 2019), if the permanent presidency of the council is now ensuring the continuity and coherence (Vanhoonacker et al. 2011) or track the impact of socialisation processes on Council officials and national representatives (Juncos & Pomorska 2006; 2011). Still, the opinions and conclusions expressed in them are applicable in our research.

### **3.1.1. Advantages of the permanent Presidency**

The most repeated improvement by the interviewees is precisely the desired **continuity on the agenda**. One EEAS official interviewed by Maurer and Wright on their study “Still Governing in the Shadows? The Role of the PSC in the Post-Lisbon EU Foreign Policy Architecture” explained that now they follow a broader agenda and that they can come regularly back to certain issues that probably with the rotating presidency could fade away. In the same way, the Czech Permanent Representation expressed that it also facilitates a longer-term perspective (Maurer and Wright 2019, 18).

To this continuity are added the benefits of **permanence** which ensures that the EEAS knows its colleagues, what they want, their stance and understands the sensitives of states around certain issues. In the same previous study, the Slovakian Permanent Representation highlighted that compared to some states which do not have the knowledge or interest in everything, the EEAS is able to look at everything (Ibid, 20). Hence, one of the most valued advantages is that the EEAS has **greater resources** and the capacity to provide coverage of global issues.

Simultaneously, is expected from the EEAS to be a completely “**honest broker**” which only works in the best interests of all EU member states. In the interviews carried out by Anderlini in his contribution “A Humble servant or an agenda-setter?” some EEAS officials underlined the importance of this role and added that they always try to do the identification of points of consensus and the formulation of compromise proposals together with the member states.

So, they believe not only that the fairness and transparency has been reinforced but also that member states have greater possibilities to influence decision in CFSP since they simply have one person to talk to. Nevertheless, national delegates expressed that they did not experienced that their possibilities to influence decision-making had decreased or increased (Anderlini 2019, 45). Moreover, as it is going to discuss in the next section, other national delegates did not see the EEAS as neutral because it has its own specific position.

Apart from that, the EEAS taking over the role of the rotating Presidency in international organizations enhances **EU coherence and visibility in international fora**. This replacement is significant when representing the EU in negotiations and outreach meetings with non-EU countries, regional groups or organizations and delivering the statements and explanation of vote on behalf of the EU at formal meeting of international organizations (Wouters et al. 2012). The frequent change in office in CFSP proved problematic, so the nomination of a long-term chairs creates new opportunities (Vanhoonacker et al. 2011).

Finally, the fact that the PSC and some WGs are chaired by a permanent EEAS official is also beneficial for the **continuity of negotiations in the FAC**, chaired by the HR/VP. On one hand, the EEAS provides the HR/VP with continuous information on the issues discussed previously in the PSC and the WGs. On the other hand, when is necessary to react at very short notice and collectively with the HR/VP, the Danish Permanent Representation expressed that the EEAS chair can be important in shaping a unified EU position in a complex and fast-moving environment (Maurer & Wright 2019). As noted by Wouters, Bijlmakers and Meuwissen, the EEAS “could help the HR in generating a consensus within the Council by providing her [him] with insights into the real starting points of Member States and ensuring that [...] the maximum possible degree of consensus can be extracted from it” (Wouters et al. 2012, 23).

### **3.1.2. Drawbacks of the permanent Presidency**

As for the PSC, these changes to the PSC’s institutional environment have not been unproblematic due to an **emerging tension** between it and EEAS. One Foreign and Commonwealth Office from London mentioned that the EEAS tries to keep decisions away from PSC and it only seeks the PSC’s approval when it needs it (Maurer and Wright 2019, 21).

Secondly, in PSC as well as in WGs the representatives and national delegates do not agree totally with the fact that the EEAS is an absolute “honest broker”. The already mentioned Office from London made the point that if a consensus decision adopted in the PSC goes against the preferences of the EEAS and the HR/VP can result in EEAS officials trying to reverse the positions taken by the member state ambassadors. While some officials did not see as a surprise the fact that the EEAS has developed its **own agenda**, some member states complain about it, especially when the EEAS tries to impose it (Ibid). Moreover, national diplomats have been complaining about the late delivery of agenda and documents for debates since the introduction of the EEAS chair. This has caused a lack of transparency and confidence (Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2012; Anderlini 2019).

At the same time, one EEAS official commented that **the level of ambition has decreased** comparing it to the pre-Lisbon period and remarked that when member states held the chairmanship they wanted the presidency to be as successful as possible (Anderlini 2019, 51). Before 2009, the code of conduct identified in the WGs was the **consensus building practice** and even though the member states had veto power they did not usually make use of it. There was a general practice to keep everyone on board and a constant pressure to get an agreement. According to practitioners and academics in 2006 the effectiveness of the CWGs was usually high: the 90% to 95% of the issues in the agenda were agreed (Juncos and Pomorska 2006). In this post-Lisbon period, it does not have much importance when exactly the objectives are achieved and the previous **empathy** seems to have been lost. One national delegate observed that in the rotating presidency was a strength of self-regulation: the member states knew that if they want to be listened by the chair they should also be a good chair for the other members when was their turn (Anderlini 2019, 51). However, now the EU member states can just point the finger at the permanent chair and no longer feel as a failure whether the objectives are not reached (Maurer & Wright 2019).

All combined might have caused a **disaffection of the member states**. There is now a more passive and reactive attitude among national delegates and member states do not provide topics for the agenda as often as they used to. One member state delegate, who was at the same time active in a non-CFSP working group which the presidency is still held by states, declared that he had “the impression that the EU member states feel more involved in the agenda in WGs where EU member states still hold the presidency” (Anderlini 2019, 41). In the end, the most important advantage of having a rotating presidency was from a pedagogic and socialising nature (Vanhoonacker & Schout, 2003) and this seems to have been damaged.

Studying these dynamics is important since a large part of the workload of CFSP is already agreed at the level of WGs and preparatory bodies (Duke and Vanhoonacker 2006). If these WGs stop reaching consensus because its internal cohesiveness has been damaged, the other higher bodies will be affected as well. In fact, one EEAS official mentioned in the interview with Anderlini that this permanent chairmanship has led to a situation with less intergovernmentalism but also with **less Council conclusions** (Anderlini 2019, 52).

All in all, it is doubtful that more coherence and continuity have been ensured in CFSP. While there are advantages such as greater resources, institutional memory and more abilities to think strategically, if the member states feel powerless, partly excluded from agenda-setting tasks and less bound by CFSP there is a risk that the EEAS chairmanship causes **fragmentation and less internal cohesiveness**. Therefore, the single voice might have been negatively affected by this institutional change.

### **3.2. International environmental negotiations and MEAs**

First, it is necessary to consider that the **environment competences are shared competences**. This differs from the CFSP in the decision-making process and which institutions are involved. The art. 192.1 TFEU makes the ordinary legislative procedure predominate when adopting internal EU environmental legislation. This implies that the qualified majority rule applies as a method of adopting the final decision by the Council. However, when deciding the **external dimension** of the EU, it is decided by consensus in the Council and the member states regain their veto power (Sánchez 2014). Then, the Council is responsible for preparing EU positions for environmental international conferences and negotiations. Nonetheless, at international level the main policy-making forum is the Working Party on International Environmental Issues (WPIEI). It is composed of member state and Commission officials, chaired by the rotating presidency, and prepares the EU overall position that is subsequently adopted by the ministers (Delreux 2018).

On the other hand, the TFEU emphasizes the shared nature of **external** environment competences of the Union. This means that the MEAs are mixed agreements so both EU and member states become a party to it. Moreover, it is not clear in the treaties how the EU has to negotiate these mixed agreements and in the logic of the shared competences the system of “dual representation” is often followed. The Commission represents the EU and the rotating presidency the member states.

Therefore, in MEA negotiations the most used formula is “**single voice through multiple mouths**”. It is important to highlight that negotiating via the presidency is a political choice. Whereas the member states could negotiate individually, they usually opt to pool their voices and to delegate their negotiation authority to a common negotiator to create bargaining power (Delreux, 2010; 2014).

This lack of clarity has caused tensions between the Commission and the Council. The Commission tried to be the sole negotiator in areas of shared competences expressing that Lisbon aimed to increase the coherence of the EU’s external representation and that the failure in the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009 had proven that the old system did not work (Delreux 2010). Commission President Barroso outlined that “Copenhagen showed that, while others did not match our ambition, we did not help ourselves by not speaking with one voice” (Barroso, 2010). He made an association between ineffectiveness with internal incohesiveness. However, would Copenhagen have been successful if there had been a sole negotiator? Some authors have related this failure to the internal disunity of the Union because of the inter-institutional struggles and some member states openly questioning the targets set by the Commission. Others argued that the EU’s strategy was too normative and politically naïve disregarding the dynamic of the negotiation context (Bäckstrand 2013; Harvey 2011). These studies, therefore, do not conclude that the fault was due to not having a single negotiator. In fact, the old system was maintained and after Copenhagen other negotiations were successful for the EU.

The officials participating in the WPIEI emphasised that pragmatic and flexible negotiation arrangements is what the EU needed if it wanted to negotiate effectively. So, it was preferred a Presidency-led negotiation arrangement to enable the Member states and the Commission to be informally involved than what the superiors of the Commission were claiming (Delreux 2012). In the end, due to the vagueness of the treaty provisions and distribution of competences and the interinstitutional tensions, the EU negotiation arrangement in MEAs is often *ad hoc* depending on pragmatic considerations. The most common system used is the **lead country/lead negotiator and the EU Teams** (Delreux and Van den Brande 2013).

### 3.2.1. Lead country/negotiator

As described by Tom Delreux, the lead country/negotiator is “an **informal system** that takes place under the formal authority of the Presidency, whereby the negotiation task is informally divided among a couple of negotiators, each negotiating on behalf of the EU for a longer period than the six-monthly rotating Presidency and for a particular set of issues” (Delreux 2012; 2014).

Then, the EU’s negotiation set-up for the MEAs usually consists of **three institutional bodies**: the WPIEI explained above, expert groups and the EU Team. In general, the function of the WPIEI is to determine the political mandate and position during and between the sessions. The expert groups prepare technical input of EU positions for the WPIEI between the sessions. And, finally, the EU team conducts the negotiations during the sessions on behalf of the EU, except when they shift to ministerial level (Delreux, 2018). Whereas the expert groups are composed of experts from the member states and the Commission, the EU team is composed of the lead negotiators and of number of experts from various member states and the Commission. For example, in the negotiation on the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2016, the lead negotiators were from Germany, the UK and the Commission.

This informal system has not only allowed the EU to overcome the imprecise Treaty provisions but also to agree on the negotiation positions in advance of international negotiations (Ibid). Besides, the Presidency **shares the burden of the negotiation** task since these are often too complex and dense. So, the expertise and experiences of many actors can be optimally used, the **member states are fully involved** in the negotiations and, finally, because the lead negotiators usually works for a couple of years, **the continuity is guaranteed** without eliminating the rotating presidency (Delreux and Van den Brande, 2013).

Moreover, despite there are heterogeneous preferences among the member states the decision-making process can succeed in aggregating them into an EU common position. That is one of the reasons of being externally represented by different mouths in most of the global MEA negotiations is effective: what matters is they all send a similar message (Delreux, 2014).

However, it is true that since the technical preparation of the EU has been shifted to expert groups and the negotiations are carried out by the EU Team, the rotating Presidency has now a more **managerial function** and is the external representation with the Commission only when the international negotiations are conducted at ministerial level (Delreux, 2018).



But, despite its functions have been reduced, this well-established internal decision-making process has maintained the main benefits of the rotating presidency (i.e. feeling of reciprocity between member states) while removing its drawbacks (i.e. lack of continuity on the agenda).

Before concluding the analysis, it must be borne in mind that two different areas were compared and in the second one consensus is usually more likely because there is already internal legislation in many environmental subdomains. Likewise, although theoretically all member states must agree upon on an EU position, many of them remain inactive and indifferent on many issues. So, sometimes just a relatively small number of member states are the ones who take the lead (Delreux 2014).

Nonetheless, what this comparison might have taught is that to reinforce continuity on the agenda, eliminating the rotating presidency was not completely necessary. While the permanent presidency has not totally fulfilled its aims in the CFSP preparatory bodies, it has brought up new problems. Some authors already pointed out that various documents which made suggestions for improvement, such as Tindemans Report (1976), Three Wise Men (1979) and Trumpf Piris (1999) **never questioned the principle of rotation** (Vanhoonacker et al. 2011).<sup>3</sup> Besides, Vanhoonacker and Schout expressed that the debates and critics of the rotating presidency were taking place without studying in depth its strengths and weaknesses and that the proposals “seem to be more based on impressions than on a real analysis” (Vanhoonacker and Schout, 2003, 2).

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<sup>3</sup> Tindemans proposed to lengthen the period to one year and to have the possibility to entrust certain specific tasks to a single country no matter the one in the presidency and The three Wise Men recommend to reinforce the chair by upgrading the Secretariat General of the Council.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this contribution was to address if the institutional modification of the rotating presidency in a permanent one in some organs of the Council has reinforced the EU Single Voice. Understanding single voice as internal cohesiveness, the following conclusions have been drawn.

First, due to most of the declarations provided by those who are part of the PSC and the CFSP WGs, it is questioned whether the permanent presidency has fulfilled its mission. While it is true that the EEAS as chairmanship has the capacity and the proper characteristics to achieve it (better resources, more information and a global vision), it needs to solve the disaffection, passivity and suspicion that it seems to have created in the member states. To strengthen internal cohesiveness, facilitate reaching Council conclusions and create a single strong message, it is not enough to deal with continuity on the agenda: it also requires states to be active and committed. However, these conclusions are based on interviews and opinions, so other methods like process tracing could be considered to obtain more solid results.

Second, the informal system “lead negotiator” used in MEAs shows that to improve the lack of continuity was not completely necessary to remove the rotating presidency. While it is a system that requires time, effort and preparation it is also uncontested because of its benefits and efficiency. Not only guarantees continuity and an optimal use of the actors’ expertise of all, but also enables the member states to be fully involved. Thus, although there are different interests among the member states, thanks to that internal dynamic it is possible to reach a common position among them. Nevertheless, the fact that internal legislation already exists in this area makes it is easier for the states to agree on environmental issues. In any case, this study does not intend to propose that the informal system used in MEAs has to be also used in the CFSP area. The main point of the comparison was to discover if other solutions could have been better for the same problems and objectives.

In brief, whereas the areas compared are dissimilar and that other indicators could be considered to measure the impact of the permanent presidency, it can be concluded that the institutional change studied has not strengthened the EU Single Voice. For the moment, the permanent presidency has not led to a more cohesive and efficient internal dynamic and, in fact, it seems to have created more fragmentation and less agreements. It remains to be seen how the situation unfolds and whether the EEAS will be able to make the member states be on board again.

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